

Dedicated to Serving Michigan's Children

Office of Children's Ombudsman

What is an Ombudsman?

Ombudsman (om-buds-man) is a Swedish term for an appointed government official who investigates citizen complaints, reports findings, and helps achieve solutions.

What is the Office of Children's Ombudsman?

The Office of Children's Ombudsman (OCO) is an independent state agency created by Public Act 204 of 1994 (the Children's Ombudsman's Act). The Children's Ombudsman is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Michigan Senate. The OCO staff consists of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals.

What Does the OCO Do?

PA 204 provides the OCO the legal authority to:

- Independently investigate complaints from any individual about children involved with protective services, foster care, adoption services, and juvenile justice.
- Determine if an action or decision was made according to the laws, rules, and policies governing the Department of Human Services (DHS) and private child-placing agencies.
- Take all necessary action, including legal action, to protect the rights and welfare of a child.
- Investigate cases involving children who have died as a result of child abuse or neglect when there has been previous agency involvement.
- Inform complainants of the results of the OCO investigation, DHS' response and any action taken to correct the problems.
- Make recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and the DHS director to improve the child welfare system.
- Educate the public about child welfare laws and policies.

What Issues Are Not Investigated by the OCO?

The OCO has no legal authority to investigate complaints that exclusively involve: Friend of the Court issues (custody, parenting time, child support), guardianship, school truancy, law enforcement, court orders, and judges.

The OCO can provide you with information regarding who may be able to help you.

What Should I Do Before Calling the OCO?:

If possible, first, try to resolve your problem by contacting DHS or the child-placing agency handling the case. Many times an agency official can explain a specific policy or correct a problem.

- When you contact the agency, remember to have all the relevant information. It helps to write down the problem and your questions ahead of time.
- Talk to the right people. If you cannot resolve the problem with the caseworker, ask to speak to the worker's supervisor. If you are still not satisfied, contact the program manager and agency director.

<p>The OCO is not an emergency intervention service. If you have a concern that needs immediate attention, call your county Department of Human Services or law enforcement.</p>

ALL CONTACT WITH THE OCO IS CONFIDENTIAL

How Are Complaints Investigated?

If the OCO decides to open a case for investigation of your complaint, you will be notified by letter. The OCO will order a copy of the child's confidential DHS and/or private child-placing agency case file. An OCO investigator will then conduct an independent investigation of the complainant's issues by:

- Reviewing documents contained in the file (agency documents, court documents, medical records, etc.).
- Interviewing caseworkers, supervisors, and other professionals who have knowledge of the child's case.
- Determining whether the agency's actions and decisions complied with laws and policies and were in the best interests of the child.

If the OCO does not investigate your complaint, you will be provided with information to assist you in resolving your concerns.

What Happens After An Investigation Is Completed?

All complainants will receive written notification of the results of the OCO's investigation.

If the OCO finds that the actions of DHS or a private child-placing agency complied with law, rule or policy, the OCO will send a letter to each complainant, DHS, and the child-placing agency stating that the OCO has completed its investigation and closed the case.

If the OCO finds that an agency did not comply with law, rule, or policy, the OCO will notify DHS and the private child-placing agency of the results of the investigation. After the agency responds in writing to the OCO, you will receive a closing report that informs you of the results of the OCO's investigation, the agency's response, and any actions taken to address or correct the identified problems.

How Do I Get More Information About the OCO?

- Contact our office and request a copy of our Annual Report. Each fiscal year, the Ombudsman submits an annual report to the Governor, Legislature, and DHS director. The report contains statistical information about the work of the OCO and recommendations for changes in the child welfare system.
- Visit our website at: www.michigan.gov/oco. You will find our annual reports in addition to helpful information for parents, relative caregivers, and foster parents.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Office of Children's Ombudsman is to assure the safety and well-being of Michigan's children in need of foster care, adoption, protective services, and juvenile justice services, and to promote public confidence in the child welfare system. This will be accomplished through independently investigating complaints, advocating for children, and recommending changes to improve law, policy, and practice for the benefit of current and future generations.

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